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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 001523

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STATE ALSO FOR AC, AC/CB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2014

TAGS: PARM PREL CW

SUBJECT: CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION (CWC): AUSTRALIAN CONCURRENCE ON WWII-ERA CHEMICAL MUNITIONS IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

REF: STATE 132711

Classified By: Ambassador Eric M. Javits, Permanent Representative to the OPCW. Reasons: 1.4 (B and D)

This is CWC-75-04.

¶11. (C) Gordon Eckersley of the Australian delegation to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons expressed full agreement with the U.S. goal of finding the most expeditious way to dispose of the chemical munitions discovered on Mbanika Island. He recommended that the appropriate U.S. officials simply contact the representatives of the Australian military on the Solomon Islands to discuss what course of action would be most efficient.

¶12. (C) Eckersley stated that he was familiar with the background of the issue and confirmed that the Australian military had considered possibly destroying the munitions. However, they did not proceed for two reasons. First and foremost, there has never been a formal request from the Government of the Solomon Islands to Australia to eliminate the munitions. The informal request had come from some local residents, which Canberra judged was an insufficient basis on which to act. Second, while Australia has experience in dealing with old and abandoned CW, there were questions which arose in Canberra about the destruction methodology which the Australian military was contemplating. Eckersley said he did not have any further details on the methodology or the concerns.

¶13. (C) With regard to the involvement of the Technical Secretariat (TS) of the OPCW, Eckersley stated that Australia

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merely wants to ensure that the TS is appropriately notified of the ultimate disposal of these abandoned munitions. His understanding is that there is no/no desire in Canberra to have the TS take any action in connection with actual destruction of the munitions. He concurred that the U.S., Australia and Solomon Islands are the parties that should be involved in eliminating these munitions.

¶14. (C) Eckersley concluded by noting that Keith Wilson of the Political Affairs Branch of the TS had recently been in the Solomon Islands and had received indications that the authorities are discussing whether to accede to the CW Convention. He thought that an efficient resolution of these WWII chemical munitions might play a role in convincing the Solomon Islands to join the CWC.

¶15. (U) Javits sends.
SOBEL